New London County Historical Society

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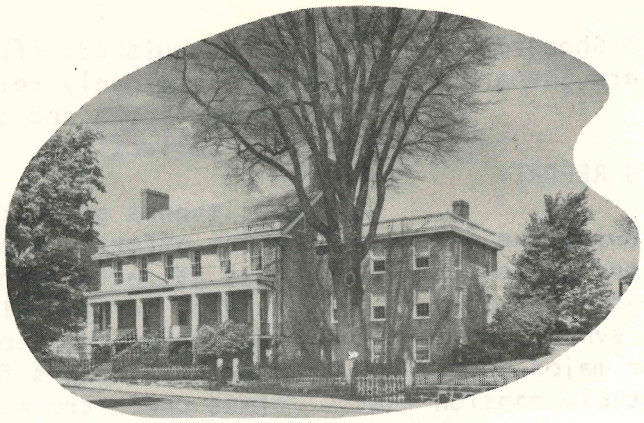
Quarterly Bulletin



VOLUME 9 SEPTEMBER 1961 NUMBER 4

CONCISE REPORT OF PROGRESS ON THE PROPOSED HISTORY OF NEW LONDON

We, the undersigned, estimate that about two-thirds of our research has been done. It has produced a huge mass of notes, many of which have been expanded into passages fit to stand in the final text, but as yet there has been no attempt to bring these passages together. Our feeling is that we must acquaint ourselves with every phase and period of New London's history before making final statements about any one of them.

Research is of course an indispensable part of the historian's task, calling for industry, accuracy, and some intelligence. By itself, however, it does not produce history as we understand that word, any more than a heap of building materials constitutes a house. The historian resembles an architect at work upon a plan of his own making. That plan must suit the materials at his disposal, yet there is left to him an area of free choice and decision which ought to be freely used.

Our planning has brought us to these decisions: (1) The book will be entitled "Three Hundred Years in New London." (2) Allowing for occasional references to events outside that time-scheme, the narrative will move from the settling of the town to the tercentennial celebration. (3) For each of the major periods a representative person will be chosen to serve as a witness of his or her contemporary scene--this in an effort to recapture the "historical present" and to bring back the past alive. (4) The testimony of these witnesses will not preclude the right of the historians to interpret, evaluate, and judge from their own point of view. (5) While fixing attention primarily upon New London proper, as that name is now used, we shall frequently recognize that she is the metropolis or mother-town of a region roughly co-terminous with New London County, and that the history of that entire region is therefore in some degree hers. (6) Our book will differ from the admirable work of Miss Caulkins in laying less emphasis upon genealogy and more upon topics of social, domestic, religious, and cultural interest. It will have a good index, an ample bibliography, and perhaps a chronological table.

The time-limit originally set for this task has been found decidedly inadequate. No complaint is made about that, and neither would it be appropriate in a report of progress to mention certain physical difficulties under which the work has gone forward. Enough that it is proceeding in seventy working-hours per week and with a steadily mounting enthusiasm in the workmen. They have come to regard New London as a person of unique and sharply marked character, deeply experienced in weal and woe, for

whom their feeling is that of respectful affection. They expect to write a biography of this long-lived individual which will justify the confidence reposed in them by the New London County Historical Society.

Odell Shepard
Willard Shepard

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It is manifest, in reviewing the past year, that we have concerned ourselves with the maintenance and preservation of those things that have become symbols of the New London way of life. Our major effort has been expended on the notable mansion that is the Society's headquarters. We have accepted our responsibility in campaigning to safeguard the future of New London's Custom House against action that might result in its deterioration or destruction. We have raised our voice in defense of those architectural and historic treasures that are threatened by the city's redevelopment planning. Our annual meeting is centered about this theme.

The partial renovation of the Shaw Mansion is admirably detailed in the report of the House and Grounds Chairman. This program necessitated the closing of the house for two months during the winter, with a gala reopening on Washington's Birthday. We will continue this house program shortly.

Our report on the history of the Custom House and our recommendations for its future use will be forwarded this month to the General Services Administration as agreed upon at our meeting with city and federal officials last June. The future of this building, a fine example of the work of Robert Mills, seems secure under its present able management by the Deputy Collector of Customs.

The reactivation of the water wheel at the site of the 17th century Town Mill is cause for rejoicing. We are reminded of the unsolicited gifts that came to the Society several years ago which have helped to turn the wheel again.

The office of the Corresponding Secretary and Curator, which has been vacant for the past eighteen months, has been filled at last with the engagement of Mrs. Adam Knox of New London, who will start her duties October 1. We are reminded of the importance of this office when we are faced with insistent requests for information that come through the mail from all sections of the country.

Distinguished gifts of furniture, some pieces closely related to the Shaw family, china, books and costumes have enriched our collection.

Our thanks go to the Membership Committee whose efforts have increased our ranks and have attracted a number of prospective members to our annual meeting. To all committee workers and to our paid staff go our heartfelt thanks for a job well done, sometimes under trying conditions.

We regret that it is necessary to take the annual meeting outside the Mansion this year, but the subject to be discussed has attracted an audience beyond the capacity of our headquarters.

This community of spirit, not only in our membership, but throughout the city, encourages us to face the future with the assurance that when men work together for good, much good will surely be accomplished.

REPORT OF THE HOUSE AND GROUNDS COMMITTEE

In December 1960 the electrician finished inspection and work on defective wiring and replacements.

In January 1961 the contractor started the washing, scraping, patching plaster and painting of the two front parlors and the hall, including refinishing of floors.

Mr. Mayhew spent many hours in the search for documentary wallpaper suitable as an unobtrusive background for our valuable portraits. All portraits had new wiring before being properly hung by Mr. Mayhew.

Rugs were cleaned and one was purchased for the entrance hall. Large bookcases were dismantled and repaired.

Tambour glass curtains were ordered in New York and hemmed by Mrs. Menerey. The over draperies for the windows will, we hope, be forthcoming when funds become available.

The dining room was cleaned, all dishes washed and rearranged and the silver cleaned and replaced. The dining room must be

ABBREVIATED REPORT OF THE TREASURER

INCOME ACCOUNT

SEPTEMBER 1, 1960 THRU AUGUST 31, 1961

Cash on hand, August 31, 1960			$1,117.00
Less: Amount earmarked for repairs contracted for			600.00
			$ 517.00
Receipts: General Funds:			
Dividends		$921.10	
Interest on bonds		637.50	
Interest on savings account		27.16	
Admissions, cards, etc.		86.70	
Leaflets, etc.		18.25	
Annual dues		505.00	
Contributions		407.50	2,603.21
Receipts: Jane R. Perkins' Fund:			
Dividends		$2,613.84	
Interest on bonds		300.00	
Interest on savings account		25.03	2,938.87
			$6,059.08
Disbursements:			
Salaries: custodian and treasurer		$1,150.00	
Electricity		183.78	
Insurance premiums		428.75	
Fuel		882.37	
Water		23.75	
Printing and Postage		245.50	
Repairs and Improvements to Mansion	$1,752.77		
Less: amount earmarked from income of previous year	600.00	1,152.77	
Telephone		93.27	
Oil Painting - Old Town Mill		75.00	
Miscellaneous supplies		16.34	
Social Security tax on employee		45.75	
Other miscellaneous items		165.60	4,462.88
Balance, August 31, 1961			$1,596.20

redecorated soon, for a second floor leak caused considerable water damage to ceiling and wall and is unsightly.

This autumn a fence adjoining the Van Auker property on Brewer Street must be replaced. A cyclone type of adequate height is contemplated for its durability.

Again, we are grateful to the New London Garden Club for making possible the continuity of our long term plans for the grounds. Mr. Leblanc, who works so conscientiously, is most capable, and his tireless efforts have made the grounds and the well-trimmed shrubbery take on a new beauty. We especially thank Mrs. Wilbur and Mrs. Young for their never-flagging interest.

Metal curbing and peat moss which was placed last spring to prevent run-off of water will be added to this autumn.

The Girl Scouts will be celebrating their Golden Anniversary this year. They have asked permission to plant a golden garden under proper supervision. Mrs. Wies will cooperate, and we believe it will be a handsome addition to our slope.

---Beatrice A. Maher, Chairman

HAVE YOU RESERVED YOUR PLACE FOR THE CONSTITUTION WEEK DINNER?

Time: Wednesday, September 20 at 7:30
Social Hour 6:30
Place: Mohican Hotel Roof

The Connecticut Society SAR and the Connecticut Society DAR are jointly sponsoring this dinner. Nathan Hale Branch SAR and Lucretia Shaw Chapter DAR are the hosts.

Rear Admiral Stephan Hadley Evans, Superintendant of the United States Coast Guard Academy will be the guest speaker.

Dinner cost, including tax and tip: Roast Beef $4.25; Fish $3.85; Chicken $3.60; Lobster $4.50.

Reservations should be made with Harry F. Morse, Chairman, 302 State Street, New London.

Hope to see you there!

For Your Information

The Society's telephone number is Gibson 3-1209.
The Mansion is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 1 to 4.

Custodian in residence:
Mrs. Charles Menerey

From The New London County Historical Society, Shaw Mansion
11 Blinman Street
New London, Connecticut

Return Postage Guaranteed

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Miss Hazel A. Johnson
146 Mohegan Ave
New London, Conn.